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ELEMENTS OF A HISTORY PROGRAM

Certain basic decisions--how much of what kind of history is to be produced how fast--are fundamental to building a history program for the Agency. Once these cardinal points are established, the questions of acquiring personnel and performing related services must be addressed because of their bearing on the effective planning of a new program.

Kinds of Histories

Previous history programs have left a base for a new one to build on. CIA's formative years are well reported, there is considerable publication for the period through the early 1960s, and some collection has been undertaken for more recent times.

There is no concise overall history of the Central Intelligence Agency--and no clear picture as to interest in having such a history. The closest approach is an annex to the Senate Select Committee hearings in 1976.

Chronological narratives and functional studies have both been undertaken in the past and both represent valid approaches. Histories have been written on the tenures of former DCIs Walter Bedell Smith and Allen Dulles, with the emphasis on the men and their impact. This series now ends with 1961. The main focus of the large program carried out in the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, was on component histories, and many of these provide excellent insights into the development of particular segments of the Agency's work. This ambitious program aimed to cover every unit but ended up only about half completed. It left many key activities totally uncovered, others served by undigested lumps of details, and little in the way of an overview.

STAT New planning should consider a mix of products. It might well include some kind of chronological survey by decade, administration, or whatever. Certain large thematic studies also seem to call out for attention--topics such as the Agency's role in Vietnam, the development and applications of overhead reconnaissance, and the impact on CIA of the Congressional investigations. This kind of history would insure priority treatment of important topics and pull together the related efforts of a variety of components. [redacted] History of the Bay of Pigs (he is currently completing the fourth and final volume) is the closest we now come to this type of product. On the other hand, users within the Agency--those consulting histories for purposes of management, training, litigation, etc.--have appeared interested mainly in the type of histories of individual components or particular activities that constitutes the bulk of the existing collection.

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Creation of a new history program will also require secondary decisions as to format, level of detail, classification, access control, etc. The previous program used standardized type-scripts (with Xerox copies) on bond paper with spiral bindings and laminated covers. This design worked well at a time when only two or three copies were made of each history and it is suitable for continued use.

Finding People

Decisions about personnel represent another key element in designing a program. The range of choices as to kinds of writers to be used includes professional historians or intelligence specialists, staff or contract, part-time or full-time, and assignment to the History Staff or affiliation with their own components. The selection and assignment of individual writers would be of slightly less immediate concern. Experience under the previous program raises cautions about reluctant or uninterested writers detailed by their components and about annuitants whose contract terms are discretionary as to hours and place of work.

On the History Staff itself, three slots have been left open pending decision as to what kind of support specialties would be best fitted to the needs of the new program.

Also important to the success of a history program is building a network of interested and sympathetic officers in the upper echelons of the various directorates. The services of such individuals in suggesting topics and writers and in brokering arrangements with their components can be beneficial even in the early phases of planning a new history program.

Related Services

A variety of activities loosely related to the production of written histories have come to be associated with the History Staff. Early clarification is in order regarding the extent to which the history program will assume responsibility for preserving, organizing, and building Agency archives, for conducting an oral history program, for creating and maintaining historical indexes and other reference aids, and for responding to external and internal requests for support. The inheritance in these areas is a mixed bag and expectations are not well defined.

In the past an effort was made to identify and preserve key documents, especially sources used for written histories, but no uniform or permanent program was imposed. The Agency's routine

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record-keeping is handled effectively, but without archival or historical expertise, in the Deputy Directorate of Administration.

The History Staff has a small collection of oral history tapes and some past authors have used such interviews in preparing their manuscripts. If the frequency of queries and expressions of interest is any indication, some effort to develop this technique for preserving CIA's institutional memory is anticipated.

An ambitious and highly detailed Historical Documents Index was created under the previous program and has proved useful in servicing requests. It covers basically the same ground as that program and therefore tends to have the same gaps. While the Index concept is a useful tool, enormous resources would be needed to keep it up in its present form. Meanwhile, simpler reference aids, such as a chronology, an index of key personnel, and a guide to organizational changes are being brought up to date.

There is a clear assumption of Agency support for other US government history programs--notably the Department of State's Foreign Relations of the United States and various military history projects in the Department of Defense--and the work of the several Presidential Libraries. Other outside requests, mainly from academic researchers, are handled on an ad hoc basis.

There is greater latitude for decisions about a new history program's approach to providing services to other offices within CIA. Requests for information trickle in, but the option is available to promote and improve History Staff assistance to Agency management.